

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MEXICO 8552

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MX

SUBJECT: WHY LOPEZ PORTILLO?

1. SUMMARY: MANY "EXPLANATIONS", SOME GIMMICKY, ARE BEING
ADVANCED FOR THE SELECTION OF JOSE LOPEZ PORTILLO (JLP) AS
PRI (RULING PARTY) CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT. ONE POLITICAL
PUNDIT (COLUMNIST RICARDO GARIBAY) RECENTLY PLUMPED FOR JLP
WHEN MOST OTHERS HAD WRITTEN HIM OFF, THUS REFLECTING GARI-
BAY'S 1) INSIDE INFORMATION, 2) ASTUTE KNOWLEDGE OF MEXICAN
POLITICS, OR BOTH. GARIBAY'S SUBSEQUENT ANALYSIS OF JLP'S
SELECTION COINCIDES IN SOME DEGREE WITH OUR OWN OBSERVATIONS.
THIS IS A TENTATIVE AND PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE REASONS
FOR PRESIDENT ECHEVERRIA'S CHOICE OF JLP: UNDERSTANDING
THOSE REASONS CAN GIVE US A HEAD START IN PREDICTING THE
NATURE OF THE JLP ADMINISTRATION. JLP'S STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS
IN THE MONTHS OF CAMPAIGNING WHICH LIE AHEAD WILL, OF COURSE,
PROVIDE THE BEST CLUES. END SUMMARY.

2. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SIX YEARS, A MEXICAN POLITICAL
FIGURE OTHER THAN LUIS ECHEVERRIA IS THE LIMELIGHTED FOCUS
OF POLITICAL ATTENTION, ANALYSIS, AND COMMENT, WITH THE
SELECTION OF JOSE LOPEZ PORTILLO AS PRI CANDIDATE FOR
PRESIDENT. FOLLOWING THE INITIAL SHOCK FOR VIRTUALLY ALL
OBSERVERS, THE INSIDE DOPESTERS ARE SEEKING--AND FINDING
--"EXPLANATIONS" FOR JLP'S SELECTION. MOST OF THESE
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ACCOUNTS ARE SIMPLISTIC IF NOT FICTIONAL. STORIES ARE

EMERGING WHICH SUGGEST THAT JLP WAS A LAST-MINUTE CHOICE, SELECTED BY ECHEVERRIA FOR SOME RELATIVELY TRIVIAL REASON. WE ARE SKEPTICAL OF THESE STORIES.

3. WE CONTINUE TO THINK THAT A PRIME CONSIDERATION FOR THE PRESIDENT WAS MAINTENANCE OF UNITY WITHIN THE POLITICAL ELITE. IN-FIGHTING BETWEEN THE SUPPORTERS OF MOYA PALENCIA AND CERVANTES DEL RIO APPEARS(MORE CLEARLY IN RETROSPECT) TO HAVE REACHED SUCH EXTREMES THAT THE SELECTION OF ONE OR THE OTHER WOULD HAVE ALIENATED A SIZEABLE PORTION OF THE PERSONS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTING THE GOVERNING COALITION. ALTHOUGH THE SPLIT WOULD HAVE BEEN PERSONAL RATHER THAN IDEOLOGICAL IN NATURE, AND THEREFORE PERSUMABLY LESS PERMANENT, SUCH A DIVISION IS THE PERENNIAL NIGHTMARE OF MEXICO'S LEADERS--A DEVELOPMENT TO BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS.

4. WHETHER THE STANDOFF BETWEEN MOYA AND CERVANTES IS MOST ACCURATELY SEEN AS FORCING ECHEVERRIA TO TURN TO A THIRD CANDIDATE OR MAKING IT POSSIBLE OR EASIER FOR HIM TO DO SO IS PROBLEMATIC. QUITE POSSIBLY THE LATTER ALTERNATIVE APPLIES. THE EMBASSY HAS NOTED IN PREVIOUS REPORTS THE STRONG PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP SINCE SCHOOLDAYS BETWEEN ECHEVERRIA AND JLP. THIS UNDOUBTEDLY INFLUENCED THE CHOICE TO BE MADE BETWEEN LOPEZ AND THE OTHER FOUR REMAINING AFTER THE ELIMINATION OF MOYA AND CERVANTES. ECHEVERRIA REMAINS A RESTLESS AND AMBITIOUS POLITICIAN WHOSE FUTURE CAREER, BOTH IN MEXICO AND IN INTERNATIONAL LIFE, CAN BE SUBSTANTIALLY AFFECTED BY HIS SUCCESSOR. MOREOVER, ECHEVERRIA HAS ENEMIES AND VULNERABILITIES (INCLUDING HIS RELATIONSHIP THROUGH MARRIAGE WITH THE NOTORIOUS AND TROUBLE-PRONE ZUNO FAMILY) AND NEEDS CONTINUING PROTECTION OR AT LEAST A FRIEND IN COURT IN THE YEARS TO COME. ON THE OTHER HAND, JLP IS NOT AN INEXPERIENCED OR INCOMPETENT NOBODY WHO SIMPLY HAPPENS TO BE A CLOSE FRIEND OF THE PRESIDENT; HIS SELECTION CAN BE FULLY JUSTIFIED ON ITS OWN MERITS UPON HIS BACKGROUND AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS A PUBLIC FIGURE.

5. A MOST ASTUTE OBSERVER OF THE MEXICAN SCENE, EXCEL-SIO COLUMNIST RICARDO GARIBAY, FOUR DAYS BEFORE THE

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DESTAPAMIENTO PUBLISHED ARTICLES SHREWDLY ASSESSING THE PERSONAL QUALITIES OF THE THEN SEVEN PRE-CANDIDATES AND CONCLUDING WITH HIS PERSONAL SUPPORT FOR LOPES PORTILLO --A PRE-CANDIDATE WHOSE CHANCES WERE AT THAT TIME RATED ALMOST NIL BY MANY OBSERVERS. GARIBAY SUBSEQUENTLY (SEPTEMBER 25) ANALYZED JLP'S SELECTION IN BROAD TERMS. GARIBAY, SAID TO BE CLOSE TO ECHEVERRIA, MAY HAVE SOME INSIDE INFORMATION BUT HIS CLOSELY REASONED ANALYSIS

STANDS ON ITS OWN KNOWLEDGE OF MEXICAN POLITICS AND ITS
INTERNAL LOGIC. HIS ANALYSIS COINCIDES ON VARIOUS POINTS
WITH OURS AND, ON THE BASIS OF HIS RECENT TRACK RECORD,
HIS VIEWS MERIT CONSIDERATION.

6. GARIBAY ASSERTS THAT JLP WAS THE "LEAST POLITICAL"
OF THE SEVEN PRE-CANDIDATES. HE SEES THIS AS A VIRTUE
AND RELATES IT DIRECTLY WITH THE NATURE AND THRUST OF
ECHEVERRIA'S ADMINISTRATION. ECHEVERRIA, "100 PERCENT A
PRODUCT OF THE 'SYSTEM'", CAME INTO OFFICE WITH THE "SYSTEM
ON HIS BACK" AND HAS ENGAGED IN "A CONTINUAL STRUGGLE
AGAINST THE SYSTEM AND THE USAGES WHICH MAKE IT POSSIBLE".
EVIDENCE OF THIS STRUGGLE GARIBAY SEES IN THE FREQUENT
CHANGES IN ADMINISTRATION POLICYMAKERS AT CABINET OR NEAR-
CABINET LEVELS(29 SINCE DECEMBER 1970), AND IN INITIATIVES
OF VARIOUS KINDS INTENDED TO EFFECT A "REVOLUTION FROM
ABOVE." IN THE WRITER'S VIEW, ECHEVERRIA HAD NO ALTERNA-
TIVE: THE SYSTEM, WHEN HE CAME TO OFFICE, "STANK, COULD
NOT RISE ABOVE ITSELF, WAS ROTTING AWAY AND INOPERATIVE"
AND THE ONLY OTHER REMEDY WOULD APPEAR TO BE "ARMED
REVOLUTION". ECHEVERRIA'S ATTEMPTS AT "REVOLUTION FROM
ABOVE" INVOLVED "OPENINGS" (E.G. TOWARD WIDER POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN THE MEXICAN SYSTEM) AND "VARIATIONS" (SUCH
AS CHANGES IN POLICYMAKERS MENTIONED ABOVE). BUT THIS

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PROCESS WAS INEVITABLY SLOW AND THE EXTENT OF ECHEVERRIA'S
SUCCESS, IN GARIBAY'S VIEW (AND OURS) WAS DEBATABLE.

ECHEVERRIA'S EFFORTS TO EFFECT CHANGE, TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE, AND HIS RECOGNITION OF LIMITED SUCCESS IN THOSE ENDEAVORS, WERE REFLECTED, GARIBAY THINKS, IN ECHEVERRIA'S CHARACTERIZATION OF HIS ADMINISTRATION (IN HIS STATE OF NATION SPEECH SEPTEMBER 1) AS "TRANSITIONAL." WE AGREE. ECHEVERRIA HAS ALSO ON OTHER PUBLIC OCCASIONS EXPRESSED REGRET THAT HE HAS BEEN UNABLE TO MOVE MEXICO FARTHER ALONG THE ROAD TOWARD SOCIAL JUSTICE. WE WOULD NOT GO QUITE SO FAR AS GARIBAY IN HIS BELIEF THAT JLP WAS SELECTED BECAUSE HE WAS "NOT POLITICAL" -- IT MAY HAVE EVEN BEEN IN SPITE OF HIS RELATIVE LACK OF POLITICAL BACKGROUND. NOR ARE WE THAT CONVINCED THAT JLP WILL NOT HAVE A HEFTY PORTION OF THE SYSTEM "ON HIS BACK."

7. IF ECHEVERRIA'S ADMINISTRATION WAS, PERFORCE, "TRANSITIONAL" IN ITS EFFORTS TO REFORM THE SYSTEM AND THUS AVOID DRASTIC INTERNAL CONFLICT, GARIBAY THINKS JLP'S SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT WILL BE DIFFERENT. JLP IS "NOT A POLITICIAN" AND DOES NOT UNDERSTAND MUCH OF MEXICAN POLITICS. HIS "LUCIDITY" AND TENDENCY TO CALL A SPADE A SPADE WILL NOT GIVE HIM THE PATIENCE TO PUT UP WITH SOME OF THE SYSTEM'S DEFECTS. MOREOVER, UNLIKE MOST OF THE PRE-CANDIDATES, JLP HAS NO TEAM OR CLIQUE ALREADY IN BEING. HE IS UNCOMMITTED TO INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS (SAYS GARIBAY); HIS HANDS ARE NOT TIED (EXCEPT TO THE UNKNOWN

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EXTENT HIS DEBT TO ECHEVERRIA WILL INFLUENCE HIS ACTIONS AS PRESIDENT). IT IS FAR TOO EARLY TO EVALUATE IN ANY SPECIFIC WAY WHAT THIS CHARACTERIZATION OF JLP PORTENDS FOR THE PERIOD 1976-82. TO THE EXTENT IT IS ACCURATE, HOWEVER, IN ASSESSING JLP AS ONE WHO WILL AND MUST "TRANSCEND" ECHEVERRIA IN CHANGING THE MEXICAN SYSTEM, IT WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE TERM OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION WILL AT THE LEAST SHARPEN THE LINES OF CONFLICT BETWEEN THE ENTRENCHED ESTABLISHMENT AND THOSE WITHOUT POLITICAL POWER, BETWEEN THE HAVES AND HAVE NOTS IN MEXICAN SOCIETY, WITH THE JLP GOVERNMENT WEIGHING IN ON THE SIDE OF THE LATTER IN EACH CASE. THIS COULD EXPLAIN THE SELECTION OF MUNOZ-LEDO (LABOR SECRETARY) AND GOMEZ VILLANUEVA (AGRARIAN REFORM) AS THE TOP TWO LEADERS IN THE PRI.

8. FROM THE USG POINT OF VIEW, IT CAN BE SAID THAT INTERNAL MEXICAN PROGRESS TOWARD A SOCIETY MORE EQUITABLE AND WITH GREATER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE (AND, HOPEFULLY, A MORE OPEN SOCIETY TENDING TOWARD REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES) WOULD ENHANCE THE PROSPECTS FOR MEXICO'S STABILITY IN THE LONG TERM AND THUS BE IN OUR LONG-RANGE INTERESTS. IT MUST ALSO BE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT SERIOUS EFFORTS BY THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION TO EFFECT REAL CHANGE IN THE SYSTEM AND TO NARROW THE GAP BETWEEN

MEXICO'S PRIVILEGED AND UNDERPRIVILEGED CLASSES, WOULD
INEVITABLY PRODUCE SOME DEGREE OF FRICTION, TURMOIL AND
RESISTANCE ON THE PART OF THOSE WITH MOST TO LOSE. IN
THE COURSE OF JLP'S CAMPAIGN, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO ESTI-
MATE MUCH MORE CLOSELY THE EXTENT TO WHICH THIS TENTATIVE
AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS IS CORRECT.
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